

Species Status Assessment

Common Name: Clapper Rail **Date Updated:** 2024-12-20
Scientific Name: *Rallus crepitans* **Updated By:** Tgh, V.Bonaiuto
Class: Aves
Family: Rallidae

Species Synopsis

(a short paragraph which describes species taxonomy, distribution, recent trends, and habitat in New York):

The clapper rail, *Rallus crepitans*, is a migratory marsh bird species that inhabits coastal marsh and mangrove habitats of the eastern United States, and Mexico. Recently, clapper rail was split into 3 species: Ridgway's Rail (*R. obsoletus*), Mangrove Rail (*R. longirostris*), and the Clapper Rail (Rush et al 2020). In New York, this species is found during breeding season along coastal Long Island. This species is susceptible to threats that alter coastal salt marsh habitat such as erosion, ditching, and sea level rise. Clapper rails mainly feed on crustaceans, largely fiddler crabs, as well as a variety of small aquatic insects, invertebrates, vertebrates, and seeds.

I. Status

a. Current legal protected Status

i. Federal: Not listed

Candidate:

ii. New York: Not listed: protected native

b. Natural Heritage Program

i. Global: G5

ii. New York: S2S3

Tracked by NYNHP?

On Active Tracking List

Other Ranks:

COSEWIC: Not listed in Canada

IUCN Red List: Least Concern

Northeast Regional SGCN: Not listed

Status Discussion:

IUCN describes the Clapper rail's population as declining but has not estimated population size since the taxonomic splits (Birdlife International 2018). In New York, the clapper rail is described

as a protected bird, due to a lack of information on the effects of hunting on the population (Rush et al., 2020).

II. Abundance and Distribution Trends

Region	Present?	Abundance	Distribution	Time Frame	Listing status or S-Rank	SGCN?
North America	Yes	Declining	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 trend for US		
Northeastern US	Yes	Increasing	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 trend		
New York	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 not credible trend		
Connecticut	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	S2B	Yes
Massachusetts	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	S2B,S2N	
New Jersey	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	BBS 1966-2022 not credible trend	S5	Yes
Pennsylvania	No	Unknown	-	Unknown		
Vermont	No	Unknown	-	Unknown		
Ontario	No	Unknown	-	Unknown		
Quebec	No	Unknown	-	Unknown		

Column options

Present?: Yes; No; Unknown; No data; (blank) or Choose an Item

Abundance and Distribution: Declining; Increasing; Stable; Unknown; Extirpated; N/A; (blank) or Choose an item

SGCN?: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item

Monitoring in New York

(specify any monitoring activities or regular surveys that are conducted in New York):

Trends Discussion

(insert map of North American/regional distribution and status):

The short-term trends in distribution appear to be relatively stable. Fifty-eight blocks were reported in the first atlas and 56 blocks in the second (McGowan and Corwin 2008).

Population numbers declined during the 1970s and have not recovered to original levels. There was a decline in population numbers and range contraction due to the loss of salt marsh, 1976 hurricane, and hard winters of the late 1970s. Hemstead wetlands had 200 nests in 1965 to 9 pairs in 1979.

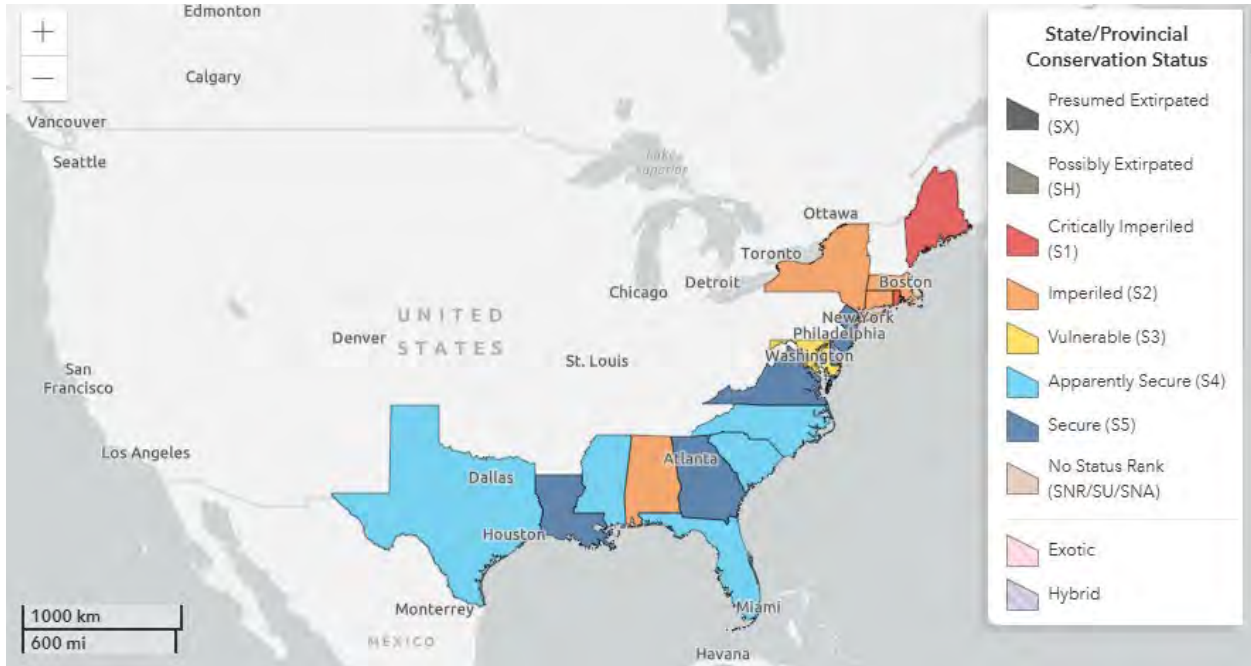


Figure 1. Conservation status of clapper rail in North America (NatureServe 2025).

Breeding range map for Clapper Rail

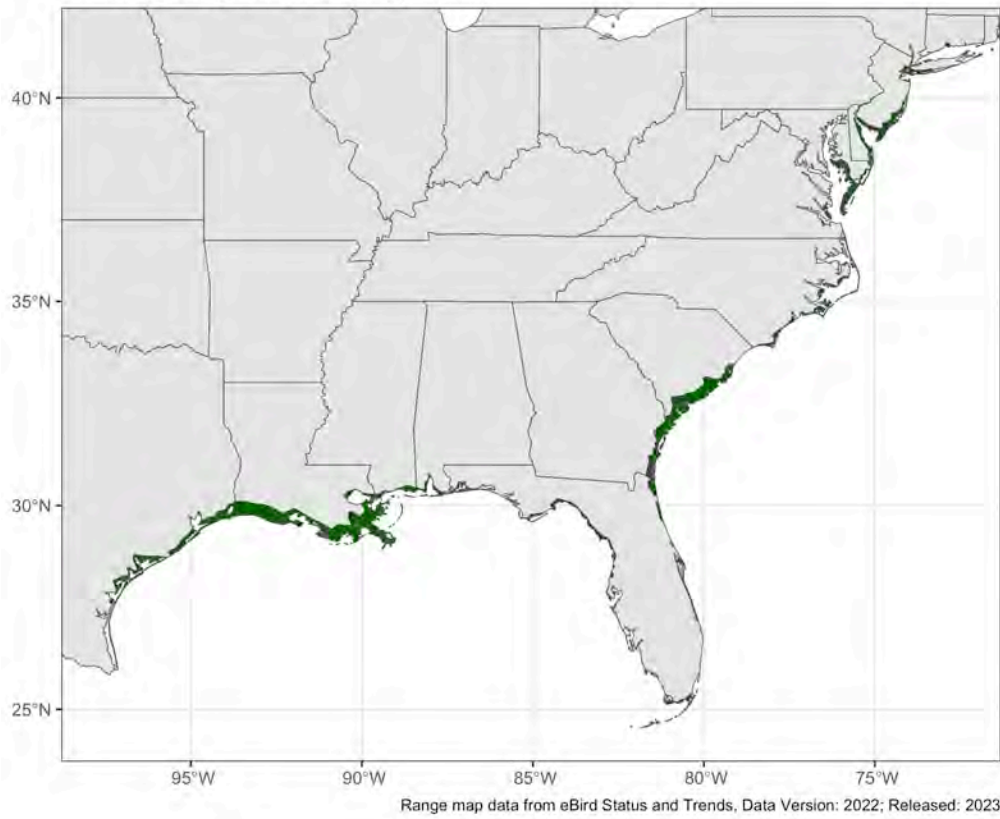
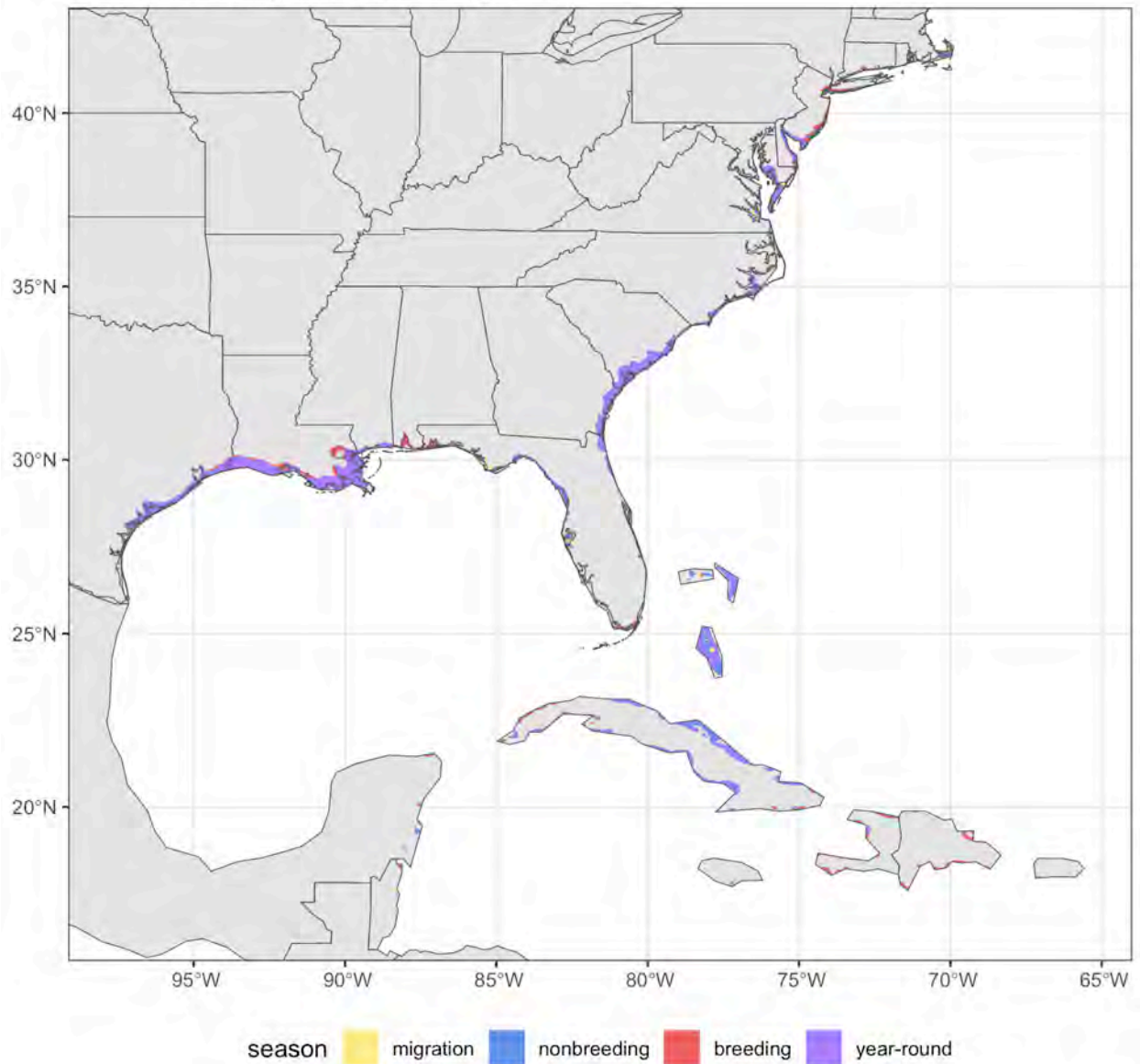


Figure 2. Breeding range of clapper rail (eBird).

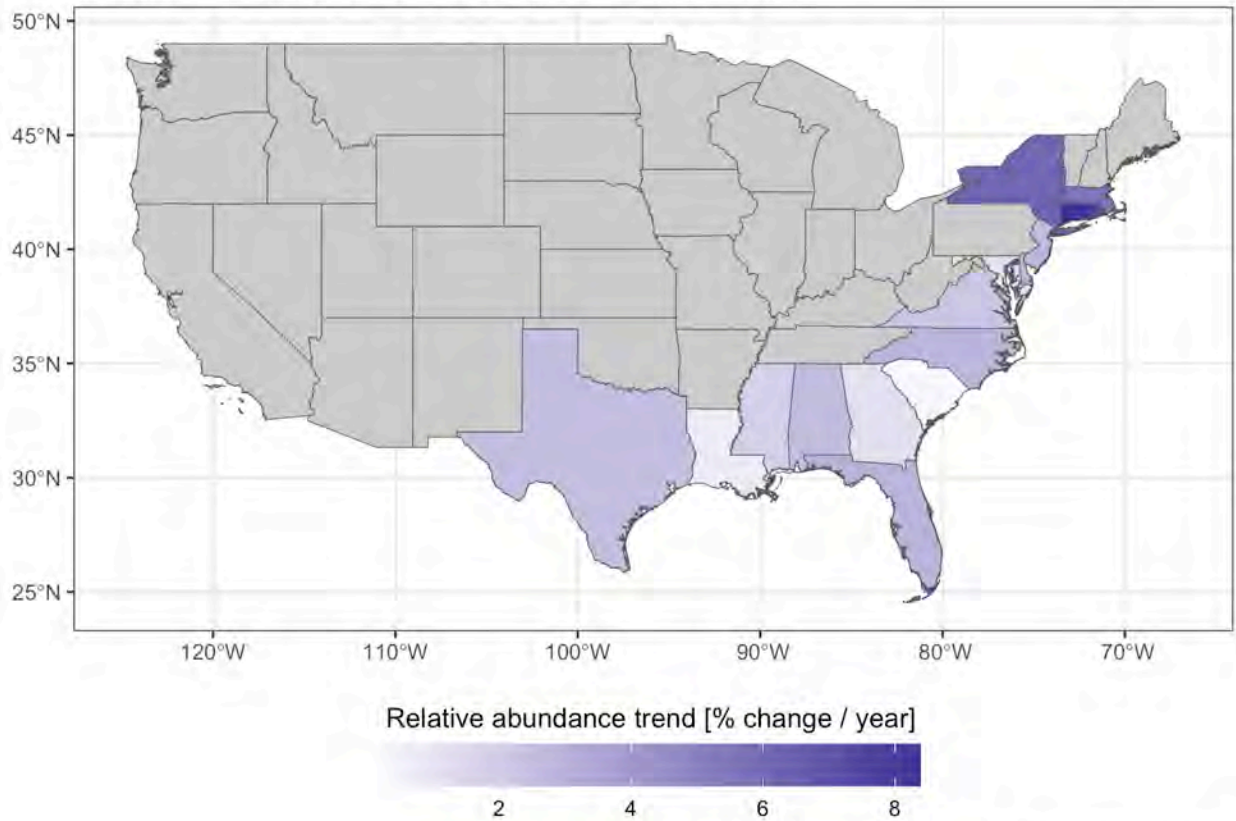
Year-round range map for Clapper Rail



Range map data from eBird Status and Trends, Data Version: 2022; Released: 2023

Figure 3. Full (year-round) range of clapper rail (eBird).

Clapper Rail state-level breeding trends 2012-2022



Trend data from eBird Status and Trends, Data Version: 2022; Released: 2023

Figure 4. Breeding trends, by state, of clapper rail (eBird).

III. New York Rarity

(provide map, numbers, and percent of state occupied)

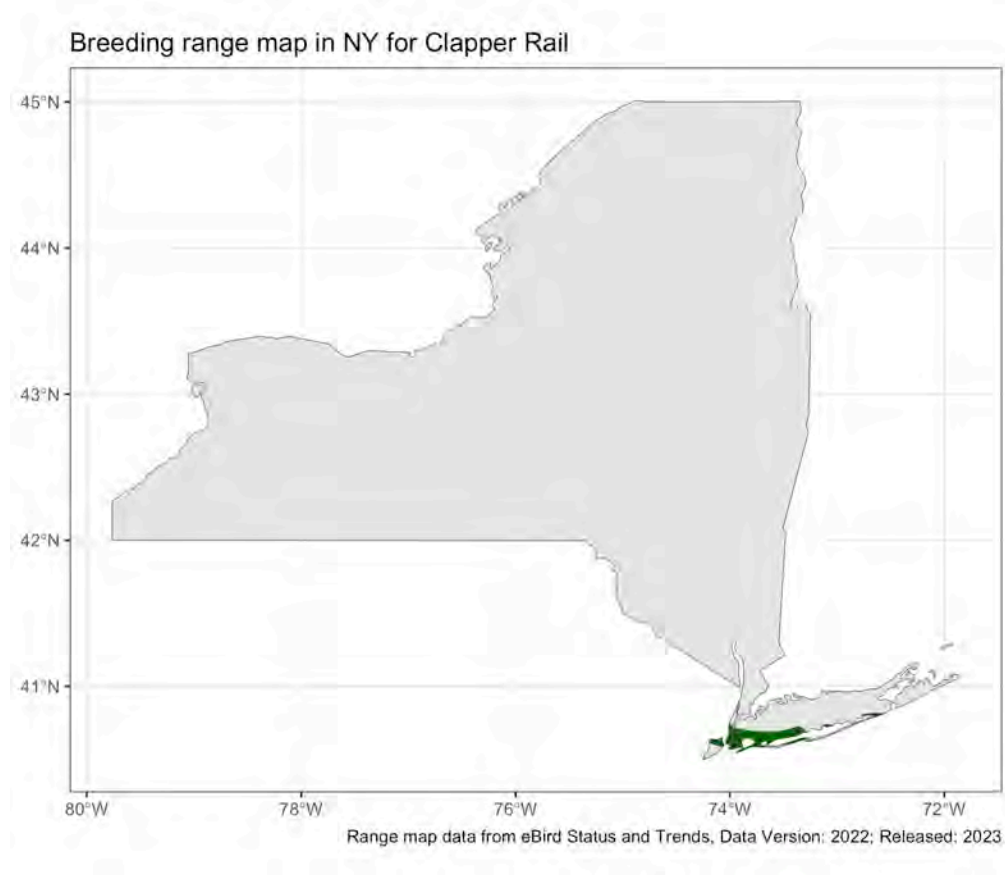


Figure 5. NYS breeding range for clapper rail based on eBird data.

Details of historic and current occurrence:

The first Breeding Bird Atlas (BBA) (1980-85) documented occupancy in 58 blocks, 1.1% of the survey blocks statewide (Andrle and Carroll 1988). The second BBA (2000-05) documented occupancy in 56 blocks, 1.1% of the survey blocks statewide (McGowan and Corwin 2008).

The third BBA (2020-25) is currently underway and utilizes a different number and layout of survey blocks across New York, making direct comparison with the first two Atlases difficult. There were 5,333 blocks in the first and second BBAs, and there are 5,710 blocks in the current BBA, of which 1,815 are considered priority blocks. To date, clapper rail has been documented in 54 priority blocks, 1% of all priority blocks statewide during the third BBA (NY BBA III Overview, 2024).

New York's Contribution to Species North American Range:

Based on eBird data, 0.59 percent of the population breeds in New York, while 0.01 percent of the non-breeding population occurs in New York. Among all states with breeding populations, New York ranks 13 of 15.

Percent of North American Range in NY	Classification of NY Range	Distance to core population, if not in NY
1-25%		

Column options

Percent of North American Range in NY: 100% (endemic); 76-99%; 51-75%; 26-50% 1-25%; 0%; Choose an item

Classification of NY Range: Core; Peripheral; Disjunct; (blank) or Choose an item

IV. Primary Habitat or Community Type

(from NY crosswalk of NE Aquatic, Marine, or Terrestrial Habitat Classification Systems):

Habitat or Community Type Trend in New York

Habitat Specialist?	Indicator Species?	Habitat/ Community Trend	Time frame of Decline/ Increase
Unknown	Yes	Unknown	Unknown

Column options

Habitat Specialist and Indicator Species: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item.

Habitat/Community Trend: Declining; Stable; Increasing; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item.

Habitat Discussion:

Salt marshes. Nests made of matted sedges and 6-15" above ground, often arched over (A70MAC01NY). Of 115 nests: 39 in *Spartina patens*, 29 in *S. alterniflora*/*Phragmites communis*, 21 under various shrub species (Bull 1974).

V. Species Demographics and Life History

Breeder in NY?	Non-breeder in NY?	Migratory Only?	Summer Resident?	Winter Resident?	Anadromous/ Catadromous?
Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No

Column options

First 5 fields: Yes; No; Unknown; (blank) or Choose an item.

Anadromous/Catadromous: Anadromous; Catadromous; (blank) or Choose an item.

Species Demographics and Life History Discussion

(include information about species life span, reproductive longevity, reproductive capacity, age to maturity, and ability to disperse and colonize):

Clapper rails are presumed to begin breeding at 1 year of age. Peak nest-building time in New York occurs around the second week in May (Rush et al 2020). Both parents incubate the eggs. Hatchlings become independent from their parents at around 6 weeks old (Rush et al 2020).

VI. Threats

Threat Level 1	Threat Level 2	Threat Level 3	Spatial Extent	Severity	Immediacy	Trend	Certainty
8. Invasive & Other Problematic Species	8.1 Invasive Non-Native Plants & Animals	-	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
9. Pollution	-	-	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.
11. Climate Change	11.1 Habitat Shifting & Alteration	(sea level rise)	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.	Choose an item.

Table 1. Threats to clapper rail

Threats include the loss of coastal saltmarsh habitat due to sea-level rise from climate change, invasive species, pollution, and increasing storm severity.

Are there regulatory mechanisms that protect the species or its habitat in New York?

Yes: ✓ **No:** **Unknown:**

If yes, describe mechanism and whether adequate to protect species/habitat:

This species is included in the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (16 U.S.C. 703-712) and is protected as a native species under the NYS Environmental Conservation Law.

Describe knowledge of management/conservation actions that are needed for recovery/conservation, or to eliminate, minimize, or compensate for the identified threats:

Action Category	Action	Description
A.1 Direct Habitat Management	A.1.0.0.0 Direct Habitat Management	Site/area management (salt marshes)
C.6 Design and Plan Conservation	C.6.5.0.0 Conservation Planning	Protection of salt marsh habitat
C.7 Legislative and Regulatory Framework or Tools	C.7.0.0.0 Legislative and Regulatory Framework or Tools	Continued implementation and enforcement of wetland protections

Table 2. Recommended conservation actions for *clapper rail*.

VII. References

This SSA drew heavily from these resources:

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